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<b>Title of your TFG</b>	Nathaniel Hawthorne's Concept of the Romance Novel: An Analysis of "The House of the Seven Gables"
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**Abstract** (max. 150 words)

American Romanticism is considered one of the most important periods in American literature. This movement focused on nationalism, imagination and individualism, and thus many writers created fictional stories with fantastic and imaginary elements. Nathaniel Hawthorne stands out as one of the most influential Romantic writers, as he developed the idea of the "romantic novel" as a different genre from the novel. It combined realism and fantastic elements, and one of the main representative works of this genre is Hawthorne's "The House of the Seven Gables". Throughout an analysis of this work, we will find how Hawthorne represented his concept of "romance" through symbolism and Gothic elements.

<b>Thematic key words</b>	Romanticism, symbolism, Gothic, romance
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# 1. Introduction

The 19<sup>th</sup> century was one of the most important stages for the development of American literature. The ideals of the Declaration of Independence started to have profound consequences in this century, many of them centered on the idea of independence. However, this idea was much more than the national independence. Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there was a great interest in achieving independence of thought and mind, and this was extended to literature, where writers tried to express their own ideas and to expose their thoughts and opinions about moral, social and political issues. This, altogether with many attempts of establishing an American identity, was the chief characteristic of the literature of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in America.

Due to the great achievements of the 19<sup>th</sup> century for American literature, I decided to focus this paper on this literary stage, specifically on American Romanticism, the main literary movement of this century. I will discuss *The House of the Seven Gables*, a Romantic novel written by Nathaniel Hawthorne. This author is considered as one of the best representatives of this literary movement and a great writer that uses many different literary devices to produce interesting works that deal with moral, social and psychological issues. Furthermore, there are many studies of his works that shed more light to the Romantic period, one of the most important literary movements in American literature. For this reason, I think that it will be interesting to focus this paper on this writer.

This paper has two main aims. The first one is to explain Hawthorne's concept of "romance", a key idea in the study and analysis of Hawthorne's works. The second aim is to explore the articulation of that concept in *The House of the Seven Gables* (the novel that represents more clearly this idea of "romance") by analysing the symbolism, allegories and Gothic elements used by the author, as they are important elements of Hawthorne's works.

This study will allow us to have a greater understanding of American Romanticism and of Hawthorne's role as one of the most important American writers, as his concept of "romance" has influenced later works and has helped other writers and academics to have a clearer idea of American Romanticism.

This paper is divided in different sections. Firstly, there is a bibliographic review that presents some of the main contributions to the study of Nathaniel Hawthorne and his works. Secondly, I deal with American Romanticism and with the role of Hawthorne in this literary movement, mainly his concept of "romance". Thirdly, I continue with the study and analysis of *The House of the Seven Gables* focusing on the aesthetics and symbolism used by the author to represent his idea of "romance". Finally, there are some conclusions to this exploration and study of Nathaniel Hawthorne's work.

## 2. Bibliographic Review

In this section I will offer a general view of the most relevant studies concerning Nathaniel Hawthorne and Romanticism. Most of these studies have been used as a basis for this paper, but I will also mention others that are important to have a more complete understanding of the issues discussed here.

One of the major studies concerning American Romanticism is F. O. Matthiessen's *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* (1941). This is considered as the starting point of modern American literature studies, and as such, this work established a group of American writers as the best examples for studying American Romanticism. Furthermore, the study offered thorough explanations and analysis of the works of the selected writers. However, nowadays this study is not considered as valid as before, for other authors have detected limitations of the theory and the analysis proposed by Matthiessen. I will explain these limitations in the next sections.

Another similarly influential study is David Reynolds' *Beneath the American Renaissance* (1988), which expands on Matthiessen's work and even solves some of its problems. Reynolds' study adds more authors to the Romantic canon, and even analyses the works of minor writers, expanding thus the scope of Romantic studies.

Dealing with more specific issues, Philip Gura's *American Transcendentalism* (2007) appears as a very detailed account of Transcendentalism, one of the major movements of 19<sup>th</sup>-century American literature. The thorough exploration of Transcendentalist ideals and thoughts, and the emphasis on the work of some Transcendentalist writers, make of this study a very important resource.

Concerning Nathaniel Hawthorne's works and concept of "romance", there are many interesting studies. Larry J. Reynolds' *A Historical Guide to Nathaniel Hawthorne* (2001) is a collection of essays on Hawthorne's works that place him in context. This

work offer many critical views of Hawthorne's thoughts and ideals, like slavery, mesmerism or psychology.

Jonathan Arac's essay "Hawthorne and the Aesthetics of American Romance", found in *The Cambridge History of the American Novel* (2011) is a more specific study of Hawthorne. It focuses on his concept of "romance", and it offers a thorough explanation of this literary genre separated from the novel. Furthermore, Arac presents examples from Hawthorne's works to support his explanations.

Finally, Winfried's Fluck essay "The American Romance and the Changing Functions of the Imaginary", found in the journal *New Literary History* (1996), also focuses on the American romance, but goes beyond Hawthorne's works and examines the contributions to this issue by other writers. Furthermore, Fluck also limits the repercussions of the concept of "romance".

### **3. Nathaniel Hawthorne and American Romanticism**

By the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, America was experiencing a profound sense of independence. The Declaration of Independence a century before brought national and political independence, so it is logical that these ideals had also influence in other areas, like culture and thought. This search for independence brought some concerns regarding literature. During the previous centuries, American literature was characterized by being dependent on English literature, due to the status of America as a group of colonies of the British Empire. So American literature was not considered independent and did not have its own characteristics.

This started to change in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The emergence of writers like Washington Irving, that tried to establish an American identity in cultural and national matters, was crucial for the development of a real American literature, with its own characteristics separated from British literature. This process of creation of a literary identity was soon inherited by the Transcendentalist movement and, more importantly, by American Romanticism.

#### **3.1 American Romanticism**

To understand the relevance of Romanticism for American literature, it is crucial to explain first what circumstances led to this cultural movement. Romanticism was an artistic, literary and cultural movement that appeared at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century as a reaction against the Enlightenment, which emphasized reason and intellect as the basis for understanding the world. Soon, this intellectual movement lead to a series of revolutions throughout Europe (most notably the French Revolution in 1789) that changed radically the way of understanding the world and reality. Whereas the Enlightenment rationalized nature and rejected emotions and feelings, the changes of the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century sought intellectual and cultural freedom, and emphasized emotion.

This new state of mind found its way to literature, and now we call this revolutionary movement Romanticism. Romantic literature supposed a clear departure from the constrictions of the Enlightenment. Now there were not any rules to follow, originality and self-expression were emphasized. The writers wanted to break with conventions, to express their feelings about nature, about the world.

The beginning of Romantic literature can be found in Goethe's works, and soon it expanded throughout Europe with such important figures as Samuel Coleridge and William Wordsworth. However, Romanticism was not limited to Europe. This movement also developed in America, where it had a profound impact on American culture, literature and identity.

The American Romanticism period (1820-1855) coincided with the birth of America as a nation after the Declaration of Independence. American scholars and intellectuals, who were searching for a national identity for the new country, found in Romanticism a powerful tool for expressing their thoughts. Like Powell states, the uncertainty to describe what was the American identity "produced a unique social climate that encouraged writers from many different culture to recreate the nation in their own image" (11). Romanticism gave writers freedom to create an identity for America, as well as to express their thoughts about society and ideals like freedom and democracy, by relying on emotions and individuality.

This is one of the major characteristics of American Romanticism. Contrarily to the Romanticism of Europe, in America, this movement had a more national focus. Ultimately, American Romanticism tried to separate itself from European literature, following the interest of the age in defining American identity. The Romantics expressed their thoughts and opinions freely, and they used all kinds of metric and literary structures to do so. Some writers, like Ralph Waldo Emerson, focused more on intellectual issues, whereas other writers, like Nathaniel Hawthorne, were more interested in psychological and moral issues. However, there were also more personal writers, like Emily Dickinson, that were not as interested in national or



political issues as in emotional matters. Apart from this, there were also many Romantics interested in nature as a way of escaping from the negative consequences of society, or as a tool for reflecting about the world. Nature was in fact a very important issue in Romanticism, and the American Romantics focused on the uniqueness of America's nature as a way of distancing themselves from European literature.

In short, American Romanticism was the first major literary movement in American literature and served as the foundations of American identity. In fact, according to F. O. Matthiessen's *American Renaissance* (1941), we can talk of a literary movement (also called American Renaissance) that paved the way for all the future American literature. This work established a starting point for future critical works, and helped immensely to give American literature the importance it deserved. From Matthiessen's work (focused on Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Walt Whitman, Herman Melville and Nathaniel Hawthorne), we can clearly identify two different types of Romantic literature that would influence future works. The first two authors are important representatives of what is called Transcendentalism. This intellectual movement advocated that the human being was inherently good, and that all the negative things that happen to us are caused by external mediators. Furthermore, as Gura comments, Transcendentalism was considered "a way of perceiving the world, centered on individual consciousness rather than external fact" (9), so individual intuition was the only way of understanding truth, and nature produced peace of mind and allowed us to find ourselves, our own identities. Moreover, this more philosophical perspective was also important in the creation of an American identity. In *Walden*, Thoreau offers his own views on this issue:

But the only true America is that country where you are at liberty to pursue such a mode of life as may enable you to do without these [tea, coffee, and meat], and where the state does not endeavor to compel you to sustain the slavery and war

and other superfluous expenses which directly or indirectly result from the use of such things. (153)

Clearly, for Thoreau being an American is to have freedom to live the life you want, without influence from the government or other institutions. This view of American identity is deeply marked with Transcendentalist ideas.

Apart from this Walt Whitman's poetry, which was similar in themes and scope to the works of the transcendentalists, also advocated for a national identity of freedom, and he emphasized the positive aspects of that freedom, like equality and love. In this sense, according to Steadman, these writers can be considered a sort of "positive Romantics", as they had faith in the human being and defended the independence and individuality of mind and self (19).

Concerning the other two authors, Hawthorne and Melville, they focused more on moral and psychological issues and had not as positive a view of the world as the Transcendentalists. For example, as Powell comments, Melville's *Moby-Dick* "offers meaningful insight into the 'ruthless' racism that underlies the nation's rhetoric of 'eternal democracy'" (167). Melville criticizes the contradictions in the new American society and the ideals of democracy that were starting to define the American identity, as a nation that boast to be democratic should not be treating unfairly people from other races. So the works of these two authors are much more emotional and dark, and they are more pessimistic in regard to the individuality of the self and the American identity. As such, Steadman considers the writers that follow this trend "negative Romantics" (18).

Nonetheless, as influential as Matthiessen's work has been, we can discover some limitations. According to Fluck, Matthiessen's work "limited America's unique cultural achievement to a particular period and to a small group of writers." (415) Indeed, Matthiessen only focused on the years 1850-1855 and only analysed five authors. This is clearly a very narrow time period and a relatively small list of writers

to define American Romanticism as a whole. With this limitations in mind, we can say that Matthiessen was more concerned with establishing a canon (his own, particular canon) than with defining what really made American Romanticism unique. The reality was that Matthiessen's canon and critical ideas were not enough to define that uniqueness that separated American literature from European literature, as they left out many authors that also conveyed that uniqueness but were not part of Matthiessen's canon. Thus there was a change of perspective in the next critical works, and the focus was on determining what made American literature special, now that its relevance had been established.

One of the many critical works that tried to solve this problem was Lionel Trilling's essay "Morals, Manners and the Novel", where the author comments:

Now the novel as I have described it has never really established itself in America. Not that we have not had very great novels but that the novel in America diverges from its classic intention, which, as I have said, is the investigation of the problem of reality beginning in the social field. The fact is that American writers of genius have not turned their minds to society. Poe and Melville were quite apart from it; the reality they sought was only tangential to society. Hawthorne was acute when he insisted that he did not write novels but romances – he thus expressed his awareness of the lack of social texture in his work. (qtd. in Fluck 139)

Here Trilling accurately states that what makes American literature unique is the different focus of its works. Thus, whereas European Romanticism focused more on society and manners, American Romanticism separated from that tradition and focused on issues that were not related to society. Furthermore, Trilling explains that the novel is the preferred genre. In fact, Fluck comments that what really defined that literary period was the particularity of the novels of the age, a model that still continues to be used nowadays and that has become a staple of the American literature (416). So there was a clear distinction between the European and American novels written during the Romanticism age, and as Trilling states, Nathaniel

Hawthorne was the writer that focused on this difference and that defined the particularity of the American novel, going as far as calling it “romance”.

### **3.2 Nathaniel Hawthorne and the concept of “romance”**

Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-1864) is considered one of the most important American writers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and one of the chief figures of the American Romanticism. He is normally mentioned together with Herman Melville, Edgar Allan Poe and the Transcendentalists as a great representative of the Romantic ideals of the Americans, especially of what has been called Dark Romanticism.

Hawthorne wrote mostly novels and short stories that followed the Gothic aesthetics that were so common during the American Romanticism. For this reason, his works include many dark passages with vivid descriptions of desolate houses, mysterious nature and imaginary events. Furthermore, Hawthorne’s works always try to represent the dark nature of the human being, like guilt, sin and retribution. In short, Hawthorne presented dark settings with imaginary events and many symbols that served as a psychological and moral view of human nature and individuality. For example, in *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), Hester Prynne tries to assert her own individuality in a society where human nature is considered corrupted and full of contradictions. Hawthorne uses different symbols, like the letter “A” or the untamed nature, to present deep psychological issues.

But apart from the originality of his themes and stories, Hawthorne is also remembered, as I have mentioned in the previous section, for having defined and explained the particularities of the American novel during the Romantic period. He even gave it a different name to differentiate it from the traditional novel. Hawthorne called his novels “romances” and, as Arac states, he called them thus “to claim their difference from the novels of his day. He appealed to a familiar and conventional distinction in order to launch a radical innovation” (135). Hawthorne’s intention was to establish a way of fulfilling his literary aspirations with freedom and without

being limited to the characteristics of the traditional novel (referred as European novel by many American scholars).

The first real mention and definition of Hawthorne's "romance" can be found in the preface of *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851):

When a writer calls his work a romance, it need hardly be observed that he wishes to claim a certain latitude, both as to its fashion and material, which he would not have felt himself entitled to assume, had he professed to be writing a novel. The latter form of composition is presumed to aim at a very minute fidelity, not merely to the possible, but to the probable and ordinary course of man's experience. The former--while, as a work of art, it must rigidly subject itself to laws, and while it sins unpardonably so far as it may swerve aside from the truth of the human heart--has fairly a right to present that truth under circumstances, to a great extent, of the writer's own choosing or creation .(5)

Here it is clear the contrast Hawthorne makes between what he understands as a novel and a romance. He considers the novel a genre to depict reality, to present society and the world as accurate as possible without fictional elements. Contrarily to the novel, Hawthorne defines the "romance" as a genre that is best suited to depict fictional elements, to develop the writer's imagination. He also gives the "romance" the quality of presenting the truth of the human heart, that is, the "romance" is the best way of dealing with deeper issues like psychological and moral matters. This distinction and definition of "romance" was perfect for Hawthorne, as it allowed him to represent his ideas with complete freedom, for it accepted the imaginary and fictional elements characteristic of Dark Romanticism.

However, this does not mean that the romance" is completely fictional. Hawthorne clearly states that the author must not overuse the freedom of the "romance":

If he [the author] think fit, also, he may so manage his atmospherical medium as to bring out or mellow the lights, and deepen and enrich the shadows, of the picture. He will be wise, no doubt, to make a very moderate use of the privileges here stated, and, especially,

to mingle the marvellous rather as a slight, delicate, and evanescent flavor, than as any portion of the actual substance of the dish offered to the public (5).

In fact, Hawthorne says that the fictional must be mixed with a certain kind of “atmospherical medium” (5), that is, a context, which tries “to connect a by-gone time with the very present that is flitting away from us” (5) and that brings along “some of its legendary mist, which the reader, according to his pleasure, may either disregard, or allow it to float almost imperceptibly about the characters and events for the sake of a picturesque effect” (5). In short, Hawthorne advocates for a sort of “historical romance”, where history is used as a way of contextualizing and giving a sense of truth to the fictional stories related in it. We can see this in *The Scarlet Letter*, where the preface clearly states that the author had found the story that will be related in a manuscript (although the story varied greatly and did not have the same characters and all the imaginary elements, it is thought that there were real events that influenced Hawthorne to write the book). *The House of the Seven Gables* can also be mentioned, as many of the events of the “romance” are based on real locations and events.

For Hawthorne, this was very important. He thought that if the author took the fictional elements of the “romance” too far, then he would be “depriving it of life, and causing it to stiffen in an ungainly and unnatural attitude” (6). So, in a very descriptive sentence, he states that “the book may be read strictly as a romance, having a great deal more to do with the clouds overhead than with any portion of the actual soil of the County of Essex” (6). As these two quotations suggest, Hawthorne means that the “romance” must combine both fictional and realistic elements, but that the main focus will always be in the fictional aspect of the book.

*The House of the Seven Gables* appears thus as a very important work for Hawthorne’s literary ideals. The book not only defines what a “romance” must be, but it also presents, according to Arac, “the term by which American prose narrative first began to take over cultural authority from poetry, on the way to a new definition of

literature" (135). Although Hawthorne also mentioned some characteristics of his idea of "romance" in his previous and later works (most notably *The Scarlet Letter*, in whose preface Hawthorne already offered some glimpses of what will later be defined in other works), it is *The House of the Seven Gables* the book that really started the change in American literature. For this reason, I have chosen this book as the focus of my exploration of Hawthorne's literary ideals.

However, despite the importance of the concept of "romance" for American literature, Fluck warns us that

the romance does not dominate American literature, nor does it define a specifically American tradition. Clearly, it is not the representative American genre and, thus, a history of American literature based primarily on the idea of the centrality of the American romance remains woefully inadequate. (421)

Instead, he affirms that Hawthorne's definition "was in itself an exemplary act of self-authorization. It did not describe an American tradition; rather, it was an attempt to elevate the historical romance to a new level of epistemological promise and artistic respectability" (420).

So the importance of Hawthorne's contribution is clear, but we must not think that his idea of "romance" is applied to the whole of American literature. It was mostly a new way of understanding it and a starting point for all the future studies of American writers, for previously American literature was not considered an interesting subject of study as it did not have many unique particularities.

## 4. Analysis of *The House of the Seven Gables*

As I mentioned in the previous section, *The House of the Seven Gables* is a book that represents very well Hawthorne's concept of "romance". In order to support this argument, I will analyze the novel and emphasize the elements that Hawthorne uses to express his literary ideas about what a "romance" should deal with. Mainly, I will focus on the metaphors, the symbolism, and the Gothic and fantastic elements found in the book, as well as in their importance for the overall aim of the novel.

### 4.1 Symbolism, Gothic elements and the influence of the past

*The House of the Seven Gables* is a "romance", and as I previously stated, this means that it tries to explore the truth of the human heart, as well as moral issues concerning human nature. In this case, Hawthorne's aim is to reflect on the power of the past in our present lives, and to show this, he chooses to represent how the past sins and traditions of the Pyncheon family have consequences for future generations. Hawthorne finds in symbolism an excellent literary resource to convey all these ideas, and in this analysis, I will emphasize the most important symbols we can find in *The House of the Seven Gables*.

The most obvious symbol of the novel is the titular House of the Seven Gables. The house is used to convey the idea that the past can have negative consequences in the present or the future, and also the idea that if we do not let the past go, we will live always secluded and isolated. Hawthorne uses many literary resources to convey these issues. The most notable examples are the Gothic elements he includes in the description of the house, which is depicted as dark, dusty, gloomy and somber. Its stairs creak, the roof is broken, the house is in complete decay. Even nature is portrayed negatively, as it "adopted to herself this desolate, decaying, gusty, rusty old house of the Pyncheon family" (32), and "water [...] entirely lost the deliciousness of its pristine quality" (17). Following this Gothic atmosphere, the house also feels like a mysterious, fantastic place, as it is thought to be haunted by the ghosts of the ancient Pyncheons. Sometimes, like after the death of Colonel



Pyncheon, “a voice spoke loudly among the guests, the tones of which were like those of old Matthew Maule” (22), and Hepzibah thinks that “pale visages [were] awaiting her” (215) in a moment of grief and fear. All of this suggests that the inhabitants of the house are so much obsessed with the past of the Pyncheons that their sense of reality is distorted in many occasions.

Furthermore, it is also worth noting another symbol closely connected to the house as a whole. I refer to the portrait of Colonel Pyncheon, the ancestor that committed an act so heinous that it is said that his descendants will be cursed forever. This portrait is very important, as it serves as a constant reminder of the sins of the Pyncheon family. And thus, it becomes a visible symbol of the negative influence the past can have in future generations. Thanks to the portrait, that is always vigilant, we know that the current situation of the house is related to the strong impact the past has had in the Pyncheons. In fact, the portrait seems to be alive, and it embodies the inability of the Pyncheons to let their past go, as we can see in Chapter 13, when “the portrait had been frowning, clenching its fist, and giving many such proofs of excessive discomposure” (180) as Gervayse Pyncheon tells Matthew Maule that he wants to give him the house. For these reasons, it is not surprising that, when Hepzibah starts feeling hope that the shop she sets up could help her move on with her life, she thinks of turning “the old Pyncheon portraits with their faces to the wall” (54); or that at the end of the novel, when Hepzibah and Clifford finally escape from the house and it seems that they are going to start their lives anew, the portrait of the Colonel falls to the ground, revealing a document that entitles them to a huge portion of land. In these cases, the fall or the disappearance of the portrait symbolizes that the characters are finally able to move on with their lives and of letting the past go.

Overall, Hawthorne uses this old house as an example of what could happen if we let the past dominate our lives: we would lead a pessimistic, sad life, and we would slowly degenerate until we die. In fact, the house feels like a prison, and only when Clifford and Hepzibah escape from this sad place (that is, when they are able to

escape from the past and the traditions of their family), do they feel happy and find hope again.

Another interesting symbol is found in the hens of the Pyncheon Garden. In Chapter 6, the narrator tells us that there are some chickens and hens that are “pure specimens of a breed which had been transmitted down as an heirloom in the Pyncheon family” (86). In the past, this breed of hens and chickens was magnificent, and laid very big eggs, but, as the narrator states, “the hens were now scarcely larger than pigeons, and had a queer, rusty, withered aspect, as a result of too strict a watchfulness to keep them pure” (86). This parallels the situation of the Pyncheons, who were once a dignified and rich family, but nowadays their bloodline is withering and impoverishes more and more as a consequence of their strict traditions of keeping their family pure. However, when Clifford and Phoebe free the hens from the chicken coop, the animals seem to recover their former magnificence. This symbolizes the importance of freedom and release, that is, the need of escaping from the oppression of the past, so what Clifford and Hepzibah need to improve their situation is simply to leave the house and the past of their family.

Although *The House of the Seven Gables* depicts many pessimistic situations and characters, there is also place for optimism. Ironically, it is a Pyncheon who will offer the other characters a happier future. I am talking of Phoebe, the cousin of Hepzibah and Clifford. She is the opposite of her two cousins (and of her other relatives, actually), as she has had the luck of growing up in a completely different environment, separated from the Pyncheons’ traditions and dark past. If her cousins are clear examples of people with a sad, pessimistic life, Phoebe is a girl that brings hope and happiness wherever she goes. We can see her positive influence throughout very powerful metaphors. When she arrives to the house, it seems like a ray of light starts illuminating the house, and all that was dark and sombre before her arrival, now “had been purified of all former evil and sorrow by her sweet breath and happy thoughts.” (72). Furthermore, “a wild hut of underbrush, tossed together

by wayfarers through the primitive forest, would acquire the home aspect by one night's lodging of such a woman." (71). In short, by cleaning the dust and decorating the gloomy house, Phoebe is an example of how wrong are the Pyncheon ways and how much do Hepzibah and Clifford need to escape from the past of their family. Actually, during Phoebe's stay, her cousins start changing a little, especially Clifford, who treats Phoebe as his daughter and is completely enchanted by her sweetness, which allows him to become happier and to leave aside his worries. However, when Phoebe leaves the house, Clifford and Hepzibah return to their sad lives, which is symbolized by a storm.

Another sign of positivity is the character of Holgrave. He is constantly impelling Hepzibah to let the past go and to think of her own future. Holgrave makes interesting comments about the influence of the past, like for example this:

It [the past] lies upon the Present like a giant's dead body. In fact, the case is just as if a young giant were compelled to waste all his strength in carrying about the corpse of the old giant, his grandfather, who died a long while ago, and only needs to be decently buried. (167)

This comment is significant, as it helps us understand better Holgrave's personality. As it is revealed at the end of novel, Holgrave is a descendant of the Maule family. However, instead of lamenting his bad luck and being resented with the Pyncheons (or as he said, instead of carrying the corpse of the giant called Past), he has moved on with his life, and he even declares his love for Phoebe, a Pyncheon herself. Thus, Holgrave appears as a positive example of *The House of the Seven Gables'* main theme, and shows us that it is better to focus on the present and create our own future, not the one dictated by traditions and the past.

To end this section, I will discuss an interesting metaphor found in the Pyncheon Garden. Holgrave finds in the chest of an ancient Pyncheon some vine seeds, and he decides to test if they are still alive. As the narrator says, "the result of his experiment was a splendid row of bean-vines, clambering, early, to the full height of

the poles, and arraying them, from top to bottom, in a spiral profusion of red blossoms." (137). This symbolizes hope and growth in the character of Clifford. The growth of the seeds, which were found in the chest of one of his corrupt ancestors, into beautiful vines means that something good can come out of the corruption of the past, so there is still hope for Clifford and a chance to start his life again. Indeed, he will find his life changed with the death of Judge Pyncheon, who was the last thread that connected Clifford to his unfair and sad past. This can be considered as a sort of reward for not giving up in his hopes of changing his life.

#### **4.2 The deceptiveness of appearances and greed**

Apart from the issue of the past, *The House of the Seven Gables* presents other interesting matters that also reflect human nature, as the idea of "romance" implies. First, there are many symbols that convey the idea that sometimes appearances can be wrong. The clearest example is the character of Judge Pyncheon, who is always smiling. Most people are fooled by this smile and consider him to be an outstanding and fair man, but the truth is that there is a dark side to his personality. We are aware of this when Phoebe, previously described as wise and quite perceptive, refuses to be kissed by her uncle. The narrator says that "Phoebe was startled by the change in Judge Pyncheon's face" and that his expression was now "cold, hard, immitigable" (112). Furthermore, characters like Holgrave or Phoebe herself point out many times that Judge Pyncheon is very similar to the portrait of Colonel Pyncheon. For example, when Phoebe sees Judge Pyncheon entering into Hepzibah's shop, she feels "that the original Puritan, of whom she had heard so many sombre traditions [...] had now stepped into the shop" (113). With this comparison, the narrator is implying that maybe Judge Pyncheon is also as corrupt as Colonel Pyncheon, for "the weaknesses and defects, the bad passions, the mean tendencies, and the moral diseases which lead to crime are handed down from one generation to another" (112).

In this regard, the most powerful symbol is found in a metaphor explained by the narrator. In Chapter 15, the deceptiveness of appearances of Judge Pyncheon is compared with a palace. To the visitors, the palace may seem magnificent and very beautiful, but maybe it has dark, gloomy dungeons that hide some corpses.

However, the visitors are not aware of the foul stench of the corpses because of the fragrances used by the owner of the palace (the owner being Judge Pyncheon, who tries to hide his sins and his bad actions with happy smiles, and material things like money). In fact, as the narrator says, even the owner “will not be conscious of it [the stench], for it has long been his daily breath!” (207), meaning that Judge Pyncheon is not aware of his deceptiveness, as he has grown to believe that the façade he puts is the reality and that there is nothing wrong with him. It is not until the end of the novel when all the foul actions of Judge Pyncheon are revealed to the world, and only when he is dead.

Another important issue represented in *The House of the Seven Gables* is that of greed. We are continually told how the Pyncheon family was cursed by Matthew Maule, and so whenever something bad happens to the Pyncheons, the rumors say that it is due to the curse. When Colonel Pyncheon dies, it is said that “a voice spoke loudly among the guests, the tones of which were like those of old Matthew Maule” (22). The death of Jaffrey Pyncheon (Judge Pyncheon’s uncle) is also attributed to the curse of Matthew Maule. The death of Judge Pyncheon is attributed by the narrator to the armchair in which he sat, considered to be the very same armchair where Colonel Pyncheon died (and thus, it is thought to be cursed). And the misfortune of Alice Pyncheon is attributed to the supposedly magical powers of the grandson of Matthew Maule, who “by the marvellous power of this eye, could draw people into his own mind, or send them, if he pleased, to do errands to his grandfather, in the spiritual world” (173).

However, if we consider these events more thoroughly, we can safely assume that the Pyncheons’ were the ones who brought their misfortunes upon themselves.

Colonel Pyncheon, Judge Pyncheon and Jaffrey Pyncheon all died of apoplexy due to some shocking events in their lives, mostly derived from their greed (for example, Jaffrey Pyncheon died due to the shock of finding his nephew searching an inheritance document). And Alice Pyncheon's misfortunes were caused by his father's extreme greed, which made him "sell" his daughter to Matthew Maule just to obtain a document that would make him rich.

### **4.3 Fantasy and reality**

To end with the analysis of the novel, I will talk about the elements used by Hawthorne to combine fantasy and reality in the story, which is one of the main characteristics of the concept of "romance". The first chapter of *The House of the Seven Gables* is mostly focused on giving some context to the story, and so we find long narrations about the Pyncheon family's background and about the house's dark past. This allows Hawthorne to add some seemingly real background to what is a fictional story. He mentions real-life institutions from his age and even some real places and combines them with fictitious characters and events.

The most notable element to mix fantasy and reality, though, is the great importance that trances and dreams have in the story. Specifically, the presence of mesmerism is visible throughout the book. Mesmerism was a pseudo-science that used to induce a person to go into a state of deep sleep for healing purposes. In a way, it can be considered as the 18<sup>th</sup> century equivalent to hypnosis. Mesmerism had a lot of influence in literature and culture, and according to Fuller, it "looms as a much larger determinant of the nineteenth century's legacy to modern self-understanding than we had formerly observed" (qtd. in Bu, Li 489). Many American writers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century used mesmerism to simulate trances and dreams, and Hawthorne was one of them. As Tatar explains, for Hawthorne "the mesmerist stands as a model for the coldly intellectual artist" (qtd. in Bu, Li 489). In fact, Hawthorne used mesmerism as an important tool that allowed him to analyze the psychology of his characters. In *The House of the Seven Gables* we can find many examples of mesmerism. The most

important examples are found in the story of Alice Pyncheon. When Matthew Maule spoke with Alice, he put her to sleep and manipulated her dreams with some visions. As the narrator says, “during her trance, Alice described three figures as being present to her spiritualized perception” (p. 198), that is, the scene seemed like a magical, fantastic event, and Alice acted as a medium to talk with spirits.

Another example of mesmerism can be found when Holgrave ends Alice’s story. He is aware that “a certain remarkable drowsiness had been flung over the senses of his auditors”, which “was the effect, unquestionably, of the mystic gesticulations by which he had sought to bring bodily before Phoebe’s perception the figure of the mesmerizing carpenter” (191). In short, Holgrave is using exactly the same mesmerizing techniques Matthew Maule used on Alice in the story. However, although Holgrave could have manipulated Phoebe (like Matthew Maule did with Alice), the narrator makes clear that “he forbade himself to twine that one link more which might have rendered his spell over Phoebe indissoluble” (192).

This mesmerizing episodes seem surreal and fantastic, adding a magical aura that is very characteristic in Hawthorne’s “romances”, but we must not forget that the definition of “romance” implies the combination of fantasy and reality. In this sense, the mesmeric events previously mentioned appear as fantastic but at the same time as real due to the fact that mesmerism was a very real concept in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in the same way as nowadays hypnosis is possible. These real foundations of mesmerism make the trances and dreams of the book impossible to distinguish from reality, thus mixing together the magical and the real.

## 5. Conclusions

The analysis of *The House of the Seven Gables* has allowed us to understand better the concept of “romance” and to explore how Hawthorne represents his literary thoughts. This paper began with a definition of “romance”, and we discovered that it was a literary genre distinct from the novel that allowed the author to present magical and fantastic stories, apparently impossible to be portrayed in a novel, where realism was crucial. However, this does not mean that a “romance” should be completely fictional. It must combine realistic and fantastic elements in order to create a believable fictional story through which the author can explore the truth of the human nature and the characteristics of human nature. *The House of the Seven Gables* shows that all of this is possible with the use of symbolism, metaphors and some Gothic elements that add a fantastic atmosphere to the story. With all these literary resources, Hawthorne has been able to deal with more profound and deep issues than those of the novel, so we find thorough explorations of the past as a force that can produce both evil and good, depending on the nature of the human being.

Furthermore, this analysis has shown that the importance and influence of Hawthorne is not undeserved. Not only did he establish a solid literary genre that solved the problems of combining the aesthetics and the more spiritual ideals of the Romantics with the more realistic concerns of the novel, but he also marked the beginning of the study of American literature and its recognition as a unique sort of literature separated from the European ideals. In short, American literature owes much to Nathaniel Hawthorne and his concept of “romance”.



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